

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

Testimony

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to present the views of the Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation (the Foundation) and the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) regarding the establishment of a memorial in our Nation's Capital to honor America's living disabled veterans. As the president of the Foundation and chief executive officer of the DAV, I convey their support for the establishment of this most worthy memorial and, accordingly, also their support of H.R. 1509, a bill to authorize its construction on Federal land here in the District of Columbia.

The Foundation was created as a joint undertaking by DAV and Ms. Lois Pope, whose philanthropy is carried out principally through her LIFE (Leaders in Furthering Education) Foundation. Ms. Pope first developed a special appreciation for disabled veterans through her experience entertaining groups of them as a Broadway singer and actress. She approached the DAV with a deep concern that these veterans have not received the recognition they deserve. To facilitate the construction of a memorial, the DAV joined with Ms. Pope to form the Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation, Inc. The Foundation is a nonprofit corporation within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code whose primary purpose is to bring about construction of the memorial. Ms. Pope serves as the chairman of the corporation, and former Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jesse Brown is its executive director.

An essential part of the DAV's mission is to ensure that we recognize the special sacrifices and appropriately honor veterans who were disabled as a result of service in our Armed Forces. The DAV was organized in 1920 to advance the interests of service-connected disabled veterans. The DAV was chartered by Congress in 1932 as the official voice of the Nation's wartime disabled. Of the more than 25 million living veterans, approximately 3.5 million suffer from service-connected disabilities. More than one million of these service-connected disabled veterans are DAV members. Many of their family members belong to DAV's Women's Auxiliary. At its 1998 National Convention, and again at its 1999 National Convention, the DAV adopted resolutions supporting the construction of a monument to commemorate the sacrifices of America's disabled veterans.

In addition to the formation of a corporation to create the memorial and administer the fundraising, the Foundation and the DAV have demonstrated their full commitment to the construction of this national monument by enlisting the support of members of the House and Senate. Bills to authorize the memorial were introduced in both the House and Senate near the end of the 105th Congress. Congressman Sam Johnson, an Air Force pilot who was a prisoner of war for nearly seven years during the Vietnam War, introduced H.R. 4847 in the House during the 105th Congress and reintroduced it as H.R. 1509 in the 106th Congress. I am pleased to note that Congressman Jack Murtha, a thirty-five year veteran of the Marine Corps, and 54 other distinguished original cosponsors have joined Congressman Johnson on H.R. 1509. Senator John McCain, a Navy pilot who was held prisoner of war by the North Vietnamese for five and a half years, introduced S. 2646 in the 105th Congress and reintroduced the bill as S. 311 in the 106th Congress. Senators Paul Coverdell, Max Cleland, and Bob Kerrey have cosponsored S. 311. These

distinguished cosponsors are all veterans. In addition, Senator Cleland is a severely disabled Vietnam veteran and a former head of the Veterans Administration, now the Department of Veterans Affairs. Senator Kerrey is a recipient of the Medal of Honor.

I now take this opportunity to urge the members of this Subcommittee to support the placement of a memorial to disabled veterans here in Washington. Let me reflect on why our undertaking is warranted-why this is a particularly worthy cause.

We have many monuments in the District of Columbia that stimulate reflection on the meaning of our existence as a Nation. It is a place where we come to celebrate democracy and honor those responsible for securing and preserving it. This memorial will be a solemn declaration that America has not forgotten the sacrifices of disabled veterans, those who have borne some of the heaviest burdens of securing and preserving our freedoms. Beyond the simple recognition that, if not for the sacrifices of disabled veterans, we would not have this magnificent place to enjoy and use for the celebration of democracy, such a declaration is essential to our existence for several reasons. In honoring the sacrifices of disabled veterans, we are not only paying tribute to yesterday's gallantry, we are communicating the value of that gallantry for tomorrow's citizens.

The author and journalist Rose Wilder Lane observed: "We remember the Americans who died in the wars of this country. We build memorials to their memory and lay flowers on their graves." Those who visit such memorials are reminded that we do not forget, and have a special bond with, our patriots, to whom we owe our very existence as a Nation. Although we have not done as well in honoring living veterans, it is equally fitting that we honor those disabled in the service of our Nation during their lifetimes. It is not only good for them to know their contributions are recognized and appreciated by the beneficiaries of their acts, it is good because it kindles our national consciousness and the noble values we hold as an honorable and grateful people.

Those who see the memorial honoring our disabled veterans will gain a better appreciation and understanding of the meaning of service to one's country. The character of a nation is both reflected in and continued by what we choose to memorialize for future generations. "Monuments are the grappling-irons that bind one generation to another," said French moralist Joseph Joubert. This monument will create an awareness among our children of the true price of freedom. As with most things, an appreciation of its high cost creates a greater appreciation for its value. If future generations are to carry forth and preserve our freedom, they must appreciate its value, and they cannot fully appreciate its value without knowing its cost. We have the responsibility to educate them. Memorials do more than symbolize; they educate because they appeal to our senses and move us in ways deeper than mere spoken or written words can ever do.

I hope we can promptly proceed toward the realization of this memorial. In one sense, we are already late. Recognition of the contributions of disabled veterans is overdue. Many of these brave men and women have already had their lives cut short by the effects of their disabilities. We cannot forget that they did not delay when we needed their help. Without hesitation, they laid their lives on the line. We should not further delay our recognition of their sacrifices.

Let me also say that the contributions of disabled veterans go well beyond their heroic sacrifices in the Armed Forces. Their contributions also lie in what they added to our national spirit and tradition of selfless service. Those who risk their lives and health for others represent the best of humanity. With this memorial, we are acknowledging their extraordinary service to society and commending their courage. This kind of service and courage are both the history and the future of America. In the words of Jane Addams, "the

lessons of great men are lost unless they re-enforce upon our minds the highest demands which we make upon ourselves." Despite our great diversity, this kind of sacrifice, perhaps like nothing else, creates a bond that brings all of us together as one Nation.

Our disabled veterans took this heavy burden upon themselves, not for personal gain, but for the good of the Nation. They set an example for all who follow. That example must be communicated to future generations. Accordingly, with this memorial we are not only honoring those who sacrificed, we are ensuring that the value of personal commitment to the greater good-that these sacrifices-are not forgotten by future generations who live secure, and enjoy all our cherished freedoms and the many blessings, in the strongest democracy on earth. It is most fitting that we place this memorial here in our Nation's capital where America recalls its heritage and celebrates its living democracy.

On behalf the Foundation and the DAV, I would like to express our appreciation for the opportunity to present our views. We urge you to provide your full support for this memorial.

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